Candlelight Meditation
December 24, 1974
11:00 P.M.

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One has to assume that God, in His freedom and infinite wisdom, had any number of alternatives. His purpose was to reveal Himself: to demonstrate that the Eternal God is friendly: that He is for men and not against them. His purpose was to do something that would indicate that holiness is not reserved for some place other than life, but that life itself contains the ever-present possibility of the Holy. God wanted to do something which men would understand.

There must have been no dirth of suggestions in the courts of heaven: a conquering hero, a mighty warrior, a spectacular worker of miracles.

God chose to act in the birth of a child. God chose the one experience universally common to all men, the awesome, yet simple miracle of new life being born. God chose to make common cause with every man and woman who ever lived, in the birth and life and death of Jesus of Nazareth whom we know as the Christ. This is not the occasion for theologizing; but the name for it is "incarnation" - the enfleshing of Almighty God.

The wisdom of God in choosing this way of coming among us is felt by the manner in which the story penetrates the emotional armour we customarily wear. - all people

Yet, it is more than a story. It is more than the ancient account of something God did twenty centuries ago. It is, for us, an immediate affirmation about the world in 1974 and our lives and God's continuing relationship with us.

That is why the writer of the fourth Gospel began, not with an account of the birth, but with these words:

> "The word was made flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth....In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it."

This writer, more of a philosopher than a biographer, saw the coming of Jesus Christ as a light shining in the darkness of human history. He chose unforgetable imagery. He had the insight to proclaim that the darkness had not, and would not, overcome the light. That's part of the story, too: the part which transforms a tender birth story into a saving affirmation about your life and mine.

We know what he meant by darkness. Each of us in the past twelve months has had to do with some form of darkness. Perhaps we've shuddered at the frightening portent of the future. We've seen peace go and come and go again. We've seen cherished ideals come crashing down: we've experienced cynicism about the fidelity of our institutions and our leaders: we've watched man's inhumanity to man continue - it seems - unabated in distant places. Or perhaps the darkness has been the loss of someone very dear: or disappointment because a fond hope receded further into the remote regions of the improbable.

Beyond the story of the birth, the importance of this night is that there is a light shining in the darkness. In the long history of mankind since that night long ago, the light has had to do battle with all sorts of darkness. It has not succumbed: the darkness has not overcome it: there is hope and the possibility always of the Holy - the kind - the beautiful - happening in our midst. We are not alone - not ever. God is with us: quietly, unauspiciously but always coming into life - into our lives.

So we observe the birth and we light small candles. It is time, as the shepherds did, to go to Bethlehem and see this thing which God has done. It is time, as the Magi did, to fall down before the incredible beauty of a light shining through the darkness.

In the darkness of a night stable, somewhere behind a full inn, the true light came into the world. Jesus Christ was born.

Candles